



Newsletter

"Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation"

-CCC § 1816

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Merry Christmas



And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ***And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:4-19).

Immediately after the fall of our first parents, God, in His infinite mercy, promised a redeemer, who would reconcile mankind with Him. Man would be saved from sin and the eternal punishment, which accompanies it. He would also gain the opportunity to merit eternal life with God in heaven. God choose not to fulfill this promise for thousands of years. Perhaps He waited so long in order that all mankind might be more aware of their misery, and might more ardently desire the coming of the Redeemer. Those years passed slowly. They were dreary and dismal, and even dreadful because of the great Deluge, which swept away vast numbers of the human race, and again, by reason of the reign of fire which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and instantly burned all the inhabitants. During those years, many prayers were offered up for the coming of the Messiah. The ancient patriarchs and prophets prayed that the heavens would open and let down the King of Justice. In the words of Isaiah they prayed: "Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may sprout forth, * and let it cause righteousness to spring up" (Is. 45:8).

But at length the time had come, the seventy weeks of years foretold by the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 9:24) has elapsed, the royal scepter had passed away from the House of Judah and "tidings of great joy were brought to all the people,"

Homily

December 25, 2005 - Christmas Day

All the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah 52: 7-10

God has spoken to us through the Son.

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 1: 1-18

In 1914 on Christmas Eve, during the first months of World War I, the British and German troops faced each other in Belgium. Waterlogged and muddy trenches with barbed wire separated the two armies. There was constant firing of machine guns and pounding of artillery.

To make it feel more like Christmas both governments sent gift boxes for each soldier. The Germans received small Christmas trees with candles attached. Christmas Eve 1914, a cold dark night, the Germans set up the Christmas trees with lit candles above the trenches, then they began to sing Christmas carols. After a few Christmas trees were shot at the British became more curious and moved forward to watch and listen. After awhile the British began to sing the familiar Christmas tunes. By Christmas morning there developed a no mans land between the trenches, soldiers were

sharing rations, gifts, chocolate, cigarettes, and singing; soon they were even playing soccer.

But the high command on both sides felt they could not let this continue. The War must go on. Under threat of court martial the troops on both sides were ordered to separate and restart hostilities. Reluctantly they drifted apart. A British soldier wrote in his journal, "We parted with much handshaking and good will." A German soldier said, "Today we have peace. Tomorrow you fight for your country; I fight for mine. Good luck.." By New Year's Day the shooting had restarted. Millions would die before wars end in 1918.

What happened on that battlefield in 1914 is exactly why Jesus came to this world and comes to each person. In the midst of war, chaos, and insanity, Jesus brought a moment of peace and true brotherhood. Like in the story the Christmas peace and goodwill was short lived and gave way to what seems more normal; fighting, disorder, and brother against brother.

Jesus has the power to break through the insanity of this world and the insanity of our lives and bring the true peace and unity we desire and indeed were made for. The tragedy of this world is that sin and darkness has held this world hostage for so long that sin and darkness seem to be the normal state of affairs, and most people don't fight it, or want to change it.

Jesus had to come as a human being to show us another way. We don't have to be held hostage by sin. We don't have to be held hostage by disordered passions, desire, addictions, attachment and disunity. We don't have to be condemned by or defined by our sins, failure, weaknesses, and live in a state of guilt. What seems normal is not. Sin is not normal. Sin is a distortion of good. Sin with all its manifestations and consequences only leads to more chaos and ultimately unhappiness. The "good news" of Jesus, and this day is that Jesus gave us a way out, a formula for peace and happiness. Unfortunately, Jesus' formula for peace and happiness has never enjoyed universal acceptance and so the fighting, frustration, and loneliness goes on.

Until Jesus is accepted as the formula and standard the fighting will go on. Among most Christians the message and power of Jesus stays about as long as the Christmas decorations.

In order for Christ to have the desired and lasting effect, for his promises of joy and peace to work, Jesus must have a permanent place in our lives. He cannot be like a sweater put on and taken off. If this baby we celebrate today is to have any effect in our world and lives he must have center stage. If he is restricted to a back room or a corner the desired effect will not take place, the peace and joy we all desire will be short lived and spotty at best.

The baby we celebrate today promises everlasting peace and joy. A peace and joy we all desire of the variety all the money in the world can't buy. However the promises come with a condition-follow my ways, keep my commandments, make me the center and then you will enjoy a peace and happiness, a peace and happiness the world cannot give. And so the challenge of Christmas is to get this Christ child's influence to last the year round, not just a few days, not just on the surface, but to have him penetrate deeply and give him a permanent place in our life. He can't be with all the other stuff in our life that gets forgotten, neglected, and thrown out; no, this child wants to be, needs to be in the passenger seat at all times, seeing everything and having input on everything. It's a bad sign when he gets neglected to the back seat or gets thrown out of the car all together.

There is so much grace available today, on this Christmas Day. There is so much healing grace and power to restore and convert. This child comes bearing gifts, and he is willing and ready to give them to anyone who is ready to receive him.

We are happy today that God has sent a savior to save us from the sin, sadness, hatred, loneliness, and death that grips the world. However, our joy and happiness is not full because this child needs more place and space in order to transform our lives into something better and more beautiful~ a life full of light, joy, and grace. We cannot change the world; we can change our lives.

This is the good news and joy of this day and the baby who lies in the manger. He is ready and waiting to penetrate and change our lives, not just for a day or a season, but for a lifetime. No, he is ready and waiting to change our lives for eternity.

-Father Vincent Gilmore O. Praem. Used with permission.

"Strange Things Happen on the Night of Christmas!"

A priest told me what happened to him once in his first parish. After the Midnight Mass on Christmas Day he personally locked the church. With the keys in his pocket he went to his room and had a good sleep. At 7:30 in the morning he got up and went back to the church intending to have one hour of prayer all to himself. He opened the side door leading to the sacristy, turned on a light and then turned on the lights for the church. As he opened the sacristy door and walked into the church, he literally froze. Strange people clad in the poorest of clothes occupied most of the pews and all were in total silence. No one so much as wiggled and nobody cared to look at him. A small group was standing by the Nativity Scene contemplating the manger in total silence.

The priest recovered quickly and in a loud voice asked them how they got in. Nobody answered. He walked closer to them and asked again "Who let you in?" A woman answered totally unconcerned: "Strange things happen on the night of Christmas." She said, and then lapsed back into total silence. The priest went to check the main door and found it locked just as he had left it. He was now determined to get the facts and turned his face to the pews; but they were empty. The people had vanished.

He kept this puzzle to himself for some time. Unable to hold it in any longer, he told me just what I have told you. Could I help with any plausible explanation? Let me hurry to say that the priest in question is a model of sanity and is as well educated academically as most of the priests I know, if not better.

My explanation was and still is as follows" Those were dead people who were doing their purgatory, or part of it, in the church. It is safe to assume that we atone for our sins where we committed them. Those people were immersed in total silence. Why? Consider the irreverences committed before the Blessed Sacrament; how many people act out in church: chatting, giggling, and looking around. After Mass some people gather in small groups around the pews and turn the church into a market place with no regard for Christ's Real Presence in the tabernacle. Why did they vanish? They did not, they simply became invisible; but they remained tied to their pews unable to utter one single word to atone for their disrespectful chatter while living.

The Blessed Sacrament is no laughing matter. There is a price tag to all we do or say. In the end it is God who gets the last laugh – so to speak. Those people had to give the Blessed Sacrament the adoration and respect that Christ deserves. For how long? Only God can answer that. Why did the priest see them? So he could pray for them and for all other poor souls detained in other churches. Why other priests do not see these people? Well, perhaps they already know in theory that souls can be detained in churches as well as anywhere else, so they do not need a miracle.

Why were they clad in such poor clothes? To atone for their vanity while living. People often use clothes not so much to cover their nakedness but as a status symbol to impress others. But God is not impressed by, say, mink coats. Also people walk into church with hardly any clothes. In the summer months it is not unusual for people – mostly women – to go to receive Holy Communion in the most indecent clothing. The pastor may or may not put up with it; but God will have his day in court about this. Rags could be an appropriate punishment for these excesses. –Segundo Llorente, S. J.

Will Christmas be Outlawed in America Again?

The Puritans, including the group of them who came from England to our Plymouth shores, known as Pilgrims, banned Christmas. This was due to their intense hostility towards the "Romish Church," and the Church of England, charged with following "popish" practices.

Christmas was banned in England for eleven years by Act of Parliament (1659), during the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan party. In New England, Christmas was banned for twenty-two years by the Great and General Court of Massachusetts (the legislature).

Pilgrim Children were not allowed to have a Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, or a vacation from school on Christmas day. Adults were not allowed to feast, to dance, or to refrain from work on the 25th day of December. Such actions were punishable by fine or imprisonment. The Pilgrims boasted that they worked on Christmas. Samuel Sewall, famous for the diary he kept, noted in his chronicle, covering the years 1623-1729, many of the hostile acts against the observance of Christmas. He recorded with satisfaction the number of stores open on Christmas days and the carts coming to town. "Some," he says, "somehow, observe the day, but are vexed, I believe, that the body of the people profane it; and blessed be God!"

Cotton Mather and other leaders of the Pilgrims pronounced as "blasphemy" the keeping of "Holy Days." They resented the forms of English celebrations, which, no doubt, fell at times to the level of boisterous revelry that were a discredit to religion. They wanted no "wanton Bacchanalian Christmases," spent "dicing, carding, masking (taking part in a masquerade), mumming (superstitious ceremonies), consumed in computations (drinking, carousing), in interludes, in excess of wine, in mad mirth." If they stopped there, the sympathies of most Christians would be on their side. But these dour immigrants to New England, who were known by their gait, dark clothing, lank hair, and sour demeanor, did not want any merry-making at Christmas whatsoever, for they hated all things Catholic, as the Devil hates holy water. Because of their Puritanical hatred of Christmas, Thanksgiving was made a prominent holiday. All the usual foods associated with Christmas in "Merri England" were rejected in favor of the indigenous turkey, Indian pudding, and pumpkin pie. Christmas carols were tabooed.

In England the anti-Catholic feeling against the "popish" practice of celebrating Christmas culminated in the Roundhead (Puritan) Parliament (1643) abolishing saints' days, Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. They even went so far as to destroy Holly and Mistletoe plants associated with Christmas, claiming that such plants were of the Evil One.

The enemies of the greatest Christian feast of the year attacked these and many more innocent joys, merely because they were of Catholic origin. Cromwell and his Puritans in England and on this side of the Atlantic are no more. On the other hand, the Church and the holy feast of Christmas continues to flourish in certain circles and do honor to the Babe of Bethlehem on December 25 of each year.

While Christmas is no longer banned in America or England, it is under serious attack, not only by modern paganistic and commercializing practices, but by the Anti-Christian left doing everything they can to remove all semblance of Christmas from our society.

Christmas is under attack because it is associated with Christianity--the very spiritual heritage upon which this nation was founded. The end game is to separate America from America's Christian heritage and history. No court has ever ruled that the Constitution requires government officials to censor Christmas carols, eliminate all references to Christmas, or silence those who celebrate Christ's birth." Christmas is about Christ, despite what any Grinch might say.

Jehovah's Witnesses celebrated Christmas

"Even though Christmas is not the real anniversary of our Lord's birth, but more properly the annunciation day or the date of his human begetting (Luke 1:28), nevertheless, since the celebration of our Lord's birth is not a matter of divine appointment or injunction, but merely a tribute of respect to him, it is not necessary for us to quibble particularly about the date. We may as well join with the civilized world in celebrating the grand event on the day which the majority celebrate - "Christmas day." (Watchtower, Dec. 1, 1904, p364)

The True Meaning of Christmas

Each year we are faced with the obstacle of a secular society, which tries to lure us away from the true meaning of Christmas.

We must never forget that we are celebrating the Incarnation. Jesus, the God-man, entered history to make atonement for our sin of rebellion against His Father and to lead us to salvation.

Jesus came upon the stage of the world over 2,000 years ago, poor, helpless, and even homeless. Shepherds were told of His coming. In the spirit of giving they brought their own gifts of milk and bread and wool, and, most precious of all, their love. Wise men crossed continents carrying gorgeous gifts. They, too, wanted to give things to the baby Jesus. Of all their gifts the most pleasing to the Child was their love.

Ever since there has echoed in the heart of humanity the Christmas cry: "Give it to the baby Jesus."

Yes, give everything to the baby Jesus. Every gift at this season of giving can be given to the Christ Child, if it is given in the spirit of Christ, for the sake of Christ, and the sake of Christ's own, the poor, the neglected, the weak, the weary.

Every act of kindness, every "Merry Christmas," every song, every celebration, every tiny and tremendous task of preparation, every note of your Christmas carols, every ornament hung on the tree, every strand of straw in your crib, every good work, every gift given, can be, must be, given to him. Give it; give it all, to the Christ Child.

Giving is the spirit of Christmas. Every gift must be one of love, or it has lost all its meaning. And that love should be centered in the little Child who brought true love to the world.

We must give sorrow for sin; we must give promise of improvement; we must give, above all, a home in our hearts. We must give these things to the Christ Child today. Our hearts are what He wants. We must give them to Him. Our love is what He wants. We must give it to Him today.

Christ became a helpless little one in order that we might feel the heartthrobs that the human spirit holds out to a helpless child. He came to us in so vulnerable a fashion in order that we might come to love Him with the tenderness usually reserved for an infant. In that sweet sense may your Christmas be joyous.

The Christmas card was introduced in England in 1844.

What Must I do to be Saved?

Many Christians believe that when Jesus died on the Cross he paid the ultimate price for all of man's sins and therefore nothing is required of us except making

a “personal commitment to a personal savior.” Let’s take a more in-depth look at what the Scriptures teach on this subject.

Rom. 10:9, “because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Certainly, belief is necessary, but what else does the Word of God teach?

We must do God’s will: Matt 7:21, “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

We must obey God: John 3:36, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.”

Baptism is necessary for salvation: John 3:5, “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” (Note: Every Biblical commentator prior to the sixteenth century Protestant Revolt understood this passage as referring to baptism, not simply the acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior.)

Mark 16:16, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Titus 3:5-8, “he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. The saying is sure.”

1 Peter 3:21-22, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.”

We must also love God completely and our neighbor as ourselves: Luke 10: 25-28, “And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.”

We must keep the Commandments: John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

Matt. 19:16-17, “And behold, one came up to him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?’” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

Good works are necessary for salvation: Romans 2:2-8, “We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.”

James 2:14-26, “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the

things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’; and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.”

Phil 2:12, “So then, my beloved, obedient as you have always been, not only when I am present but all the more now when I am absent, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

We must eat His body and drink His blood: John 6:53-59, “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.’ This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.”

We must hold out to the end: 2 Tim 2:11-13, “The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself.”

Mark 13:13, “You will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.”

1 Cor 10:12, “Therefore whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care lest he fall.”

1 Cor 10:27, St. Paul writes, “No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

The Church, not the Bible is the Foundation of faith: 1 Tim. 3:15, “if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.”

Pamphlet Display Rack

The first pamphlet display rack was placed at San Secondo d’Asti Church in Guasti, California. San Secondo is a relatively small parish with about 550 families.

The response has been very gratifying, as well over 5,000 pamphlets (20+ each of 250 pamphlets) have been disseminated in the first four weeks.

Comments by the pastor, religious education teachers, and parishioners have been entirely positive. It seems that pamphlets dealing with other religious groups, such as mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, etc., are very popular, as are those on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, prayer, sacraments, and the basics of the Faith. You can view the rack at:

http://www.pjpiisoe.org/Resources_WireRack.html